3t Mukherjea O. Y-4, 5 (ca. 1933-1939) 1962
AW42 Santal AW42

has been going on for hundred years ever since civilisation dawned on the banks of the lower Ganges, and is yet far from complete, has led to a distinct uplift of the primitive peoples, and has been making highly desirable additions to the culture of the civilised community."

The Santal Character

Any one who comes in contact with the Santal, cannot but be struck with the heavy-built, bronze-bodied men and women. They are extremely hardy and can work incessantly with a smiling face. If the body is thus healthy, the mind is equally so. The truthfulness of the Santal is proverbial; the exceptions are due to his contact with the outside world. Accused in criminal courts the Santal would cut short everything by a clean confession. He is generally a meek fellow; but if he says "no" once, none can turn it into "yes."

Any one who has seen a Santal house, cannot but be struck with their habitual cleanliness. All things are kept neatly arranged. No dust can accumulate in the yards and all refuse and rubbish are neatly stowed away. The Santal is frank and open, honest and gentle. He does not understand the intricacies of life and craft and hypocrisy are not associated with him.

4: Biswas D, E-3, 4 (1931-1945) 1956
AW42 Santal AW42
SANTAL PARGANAS

342
252
351
[354]

and night. As a rule they cook their food outside, but always have a fire-place inside. During the cold season they generally cook their food inside, the result being that the house specially at night, is suffocatingly full of smoke and every thing becomes covered with soot. This does not, however, seem to affect the Santals much. In the bed-room they store their rice and all other belongings, and the fowls are kept too in that room at night. It is, of course, not possible to keep such a house clean, even if they tried to do so.

342
[251]
[353]
[356]

Agriculture :—The Santals before becoming, agriculturists were probably in the hunting stage. Still, nothing pleases them so much as to be out for hunting, they even now observe the "Dehiri hunting", which is an annual hunt. During the time of the annual hunt the Dehiri priest performs certain ceremonies to propitiate "Sin Bonga" to avert calamity during hunting. All these suggest that prior to becoming agriculturists the Santals were in the hunting stage. At present the Santals are typical agriculturists. There is no authentic record when the Santal first started tilling the soil. Rev. Bodding in his memoir, "How the Santals live" has mentioned their first attempt at cultivation in the following words :—

224
[174]
[193]
241
241
174

"It is just possible that one of their first attempts to get something out of the soil may have been something like what is now called 'kurau', a mode of cultivation that is said to have been used also by Santals in former years, but is not practised by them at the present time, so far as is known. It is, however, still kept up by the Paharias living on the hills of the Santal country. A piece of jungle is cut down high up

[178]
241
171

4; Biswas D, E-3, 4 (1931-1945) 1956
AW42 Santal AW42
SANTAL PARGANAS

forest, and brings water from a streamlet flowing near by. Every morning the wife getting up from the bed cleans the house with mud and cow dung. Over and above that, she goes to the agricultural field to help her husband. In the daily social life of the people the Santal woman has a very independent and strong position both at home and in the village.

Position of Women: Some writers have remarked that the Santal women are looked upon as mere chattel, with which opinion I disagree. Rev. P. O. Bodding is of the same opinion with me (see some remarks on the Position of Women among the Santals). Such writers have gone too far. Making a tour of almost the whole of the Santal parganas, I got the idea that the Santal women have an important status in their society. Though they are shut off from certain religious and administrative functions their economic status is very high. It is they who generally go to market, do the bargaining—all the produce is in their hand—and they make over the proceeds for the sustenance of the family to the male members. They are the repositories of the moral and religious tradition of the society. All the infringements of social order are brought to the notice of the male members through them.

Parents and Children: The relation between the parents and children among the Santals is also of a sweet affectionate type. How strong the affection of the Santal parents is towards their children can be seen from the following facts. The mother or the grandmother of the children always carries the children even when going to the Mela or to the field When a child is attacked with any disease, the parents

St Culshaw M-5 (1932-1943) 1949 AW42 Santal AW42

As the days lengthen and become warmer, other activities find their place in the routine. When the first rain has fallen the men begin to dig up the pits of rotted cow manure beside their homes, carry loads of manure to the fields, and first plough the beds where the seed rice will be sown. At the same period they carry out repairs to their houses, and the walls of new houses begin to rise. Some walls are built by constructing a screen of thin sticks on which a mud plaster is fastened, but most of the walls are built by adding a layer of wet clay to the layers which have previously dried in the sun. Timber for rafters and posts is brought from the forest, and is not always paid for. Bamboos are cut and sliced; they are needed as a foundation for the thatch. Home-made rope is prepared. Rice straw is the material commonly used for roofing.

At this time some men devote their energies to trapping and snaring. A party of men may be formed for digging out a colony of field rats which will supplement the diet. Many varieties of bird-traps and snares are in use. Some have insects attached to them as bait, with birdlime to snare the birds. Others are set on the ground to catch partridge with ingenious arrangements of slip-knots and a captive bird in the centre to act as a decoy. Some of the operations call for elaborate preparation. Nets are taken down from under the rafters where they have hung since the previous year. The men seek out pools of water which may be still left in some shady hollow of the forest when most of the water has dried, for there the birds will come to drink. Traps are formed by nets, or by baskets attached by a string to where one of the men sits waiting to pull it and entrap the bird. On an April day in Barikul two parties of men set out on trapping expeditions. One of them went to a distant forest and returned with three peacocks. The other party spent the day near the banks of a nearby stream and gathered three-score birds, including doves, grey partridges, Indian drongos weaver birds and crow pheasants, all of which are eaten by the Santals.

At the same season the women find new employment. One of the commonest of the trees growing in the villages, the fields and the forests is the *matkom* (*Bassia latifolia*, Roxb.); it has thick sepalled succulent flowers during the spring. These flowers fall from the trees during the early hours of the morning, and the women and girls rise early to collect them. They are used in a variety of ways. When dried they provide either a nutritious cattle food or a supplement for human diet. They are used in

5i Culshaw M-5 (1932-1943) 1949 AW42 Santal AW42

A fourteen-year-old boy who was once asked his name replied: "By my name I cannot do anything." Pressed for some explanation of his words, he said: "By my name I cannot walk." It was then explained by some bystanders that the name by which he was known was *Leḍha*, "the lame one". There is a large number of figurative and hidden names for common objects. These names are used in conversation between those who are in the joking relationship with one another and particularly at the time of weddings. "White horse" is beer and "red horse" is spirits; "sheep's *ghi*"[1] is salt; "jackal's horn" is pepper; "frog spawn" is water. "We are sweeping the courtyard" means that we are washing our teeth; "Have you taken the harrow over the field?" means Have you brushed your hair? "Have you married off your middle son?" means Have you eaten your rice? There are many phrases to describe the evacuation of waste products from the body, one of which may be quoted. A man excuses himself from the company of his fellows with the words, "I am going to pay my rent!"

The Santal love of colour and decoration also gives expression to their sense of the joyous in life. Men are sparing in the use of personal adornment, though youths wearing ear-rings or necklaces made from seeds pass without remark. Women are fond of ornaments. Most of them wear a small flower-shaped brass ornament in the left side of the nose and have brass ear-rings. They all wear a *hasli* of silver or brass, a large ring that hangs round the neck. Bangles of silver, shell or glass are worn. They delight to fix flowers of red and white in their hair, and they enhance the lines of their eyes with a dark paste. On special occasions some of the heavier ornaments are brought out—large bell-shaped ear-rings, silver ornaments for the hair, anklets and rings for the feet and toes. The women also decorate the houses with gay-coloured patterns. The houses receive a new plaster coat of earth at the end of the rainy season in preparation for the Harvest festival. The house plinth or veranda and the wall up to a foot or two above the plinth are plastered a very dark grey, the colour being prepared by mixing cowdung with straw ash. Above this dark colour, on a first coat of light earth, the housewives vie with one another to attract the attention of their fellow villagers and of passers-by. There is no uniformity and the colours used depend rather on the coloured clays that are available in the neighbourhood of the village, but red predominates. Some house walls give

[1] Clarified butter.

[TEXT CONTINUED ON PAGE 50]

St Culshaw M-5 (1932-1943) 1949 AW42 Santal AW42

the appearance of a coloured chequer board, while others have rectangular blocks of colour—red, black and yellow. On some houses there are geometrical patterns, and a favourite design represents plantain trees. Imaginative artists find scope on some of the walls and draw designs incorporating flowers, birds and animals and stylized but animated figures of men and women; on one occasion I observed the figure of an aeroplane in blue, red and yellow earth, giving a tolerable imitation of camouflage paint. The forms are limited by the technique, the drawings being done with the fingers of the right hand dipped in the colours.

The decay of primitive artistic culture in India has attracted the widespread attention of students. Over wide areas tribespeople are being encouraged to be ashamed of their dances and songs, and their arts are dying out. It does seem, however, that at least in some areas the Santals are keeping alive their traditional arts and music, and that it is virile enough to find expression in the creation of new forms. Herein lies one of the greatest causes for hopefulness concerning the future of the tribe. It says much for their social life that they maintain these institutions in spite of their depressed economic condition and their status as a small minority in nearly all the areas where they live. Hitherto they have been spared from the dangers of a uniform national system of education, and it remains to be seen how much of their artistic life will survive the "planning" that is now in vogue.